Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand three hundred and eighty-third plenary meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 17 March 2016, at 10.05 a.m.

President: Mr. Steffen Kongstad ..... (Norway)

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The President: I call to order the 1383rd plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Distinguished colleagues, it is my assessment that a programme of work is not ready to be adopted by the Conference. After extensive consultations, we are not in a position to propose a programme of work that could possibly attract consensus. Before I continue with some final comments, does any delegation wish to take the floor? I recognize the Ambassador of Iran. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Naziri Asl (Islamic Republic of Iran): Mr. President, since this is the first time I am taking the floor under your presidency, at the outset we would like to convey to you our warm congratulations upon your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and express our deep appreciation for the very professional manner in which you have been presiding over the Conference.

As to the deliberations on the programme of work, we compliment you on your good efforts and desire, in particular your esteemed country's pledge, to make every effort to see the adoption of a programme of work for the 2016 session of the Conference. That manifests the good intentions and genuine energy you have put into conducting consultations in a very conclusive and transparent manner on several drafts of a programme of work, which demonstrated the keen interest of the Conference's members in taking forward the work of the Conference as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum. We note that, in such a situation, the President's putting forward of a proposal which encompassed many ideas, seeking to reflect them in a proposal that could meet with consensus, was not an easy task. Given the intricacy of the programme of work for the Conference, we value your best efforts in showing your responsibility as the second President of the Conference for 2016.

It is worth mentioning that several of the proposals at hand require careful analysis by capitals so that the convergence of points and ideas thereon might bring the Conference back to substantive work. In this regard, we congratulate the Islamic Republic of Pakistan as the next President of the Conference and member of the Group of 21, and we are convinced that continued open and transparent consultation under the Ambassador of Pakistan as the next President of the Conference will pave the way for the consensual adoption of a balanced and comprehensive programme of work for this year.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his statement. I see no other delegation wishing to take the floor.

As the Norwegian presidency of the Conference is coming to an end, the following are, in the view of the Chair, the main points of the past four weeks, including with regard to the current state of readiness of the Conference to fulfil its negotiating remit.

Eighteen ministers and senior officials spoke during the high-level segment. Without trying to draw conclusions from their statements, common themes were concern with the impasse in this body and disappointment with the inability of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference to reach an agreed outcome. A number of speakers welcomed the successful negotiation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Others urged for progress in bringing the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty into force, for taking further effective measures on nuclear disarmament and for initiating negotiations on banning the production of fissile material and on preventing an arms race in outer space.

Concern was expressed about various regional tensions. Several speakers addressed the missile launch and nuclear test by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. A proposal was put forward by the Russian Federation to negotiate a new convention, under agenda item 6, on the suppression of acts of chemical terrorism.

Turning to the question of the programme of work, Norway assumed the Chair following the strenuous efforts by the Nigerian presidency to develop a programme that might lead the Conference out of its impasse. The United Kingdom proposed a different approach — one that, without prejudice to any issues on the Conference's agenda, embraced all effective measures on nuclear disarmament that contribute to and are required for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons. Implicitly, the proposal drew together for equal treatment in a proposed indicative schedule three of the four core issues of the Conference that had been at the centre of the Conference's recent deadlock: issues surrounding nuclear disarmament, fissile material and negative security assurances. During the high-level segment, the Russian Federation proposed, in addition to the issue of the suppression of chemical terrorism that I just mentioned, that the Conference decide on a programme of work establishing working groups to carry out discussions with a view to identifying, elaborating and recommending effective measures on all four core issues.

During the first eight weeks of the 2016 session, we have seen four different proposals: from the United States, Nigeria, the United Kingdom and Russia. This new bout of proposals comes at a time when there are significant developments outside the Conference and which run in parallel with it. The Group of Governmental Experts on aspects of possible prevention of the production of fissile materials, nuclear weapons or other explosive devices and the Open-ended Working Group taking forward nuclear disarmament are both mandated, like the Conference itself, by the United Nations General Assembly. Although neither yet commands universal support, their creation signals dissatisfaction in the General Assembly with the long paralysis of this Conference.

As members of the Conference, we all assume the Conference presidency by rotational accident. When we, Norway, decided to take on the presidency, we had no expectations but we decided and committed ourselves to give it a wholehearted try. We started early to explore where the potential for consensus on a programme of work could possibly be. But, as I stated earlier, we have found no basis for agreement on a programme of work. One may even wonder what a Conference with a programme of work could achieve. There is obviously a time and a place for everything; and the time to draw the necessary conclusions, in this respect, is fast approaching.

In that sombre vein, I wish to thank all members, the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General of the Conference, the members of the secretariat, as well as the conference officers and, not least, the interpreters for their support and assistance these past four weeks. I pass the baton to my successor, Ambassador Tehmina Janjua of Pakistan, and her team, with the best wishes for the presidency of Pakistan and, in turn, for the remaining Presidents of the 2016 session, whom I look forward to working with in continued cooperation.

Does any delegation wish to take the floor? I recognize the representative of the United States; you have the floor, Ambassador.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Mr. President, let me very briefly offer my congratulations to you and your team for your efforts to try to find a programme of work that could gain consensus in this body. I know it has been difficult. I know that you have consulted widely and we really appreciate your outreach efforts, but the Conference on Disarmament is in a very serious deadlock. There have been some proposals put forward, as you mentioned, including one from the United States, and it is unfortunate that we have not been able, up until now, to reach a compromise so that we can get this body back to work. Again, I just want to state for the record how appreciative we are of you and your team's effort to try to get this body back to work. We still look forward to working with you and your team to see if there are some ways that we can get this body back to work. And we look forward to working with the incoming President, Ambassador Janjua.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the United States for his statement. The next speaker on the list is the representative of Australia. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. McConville (Australia): Mr. President, allow me also to underline our delegation's appreciation for the manner that you and your capable team have approached the presidency. I think you undertook this task with the knowledge that it was going to be difficult but that you were going to give your all. I certainly think that you have done so and I would like to just underline our appreciation for all those efforts. I would also like to convey to the incoming presidency, Pakistan, our willingness to work with them to see if we can somehow find a way to ensure that we do find a programme of work that we can all agree on that will get the Conference on Disarmament back to functioning effectively.

The President: I thank the representative of Australia for his statement. The next speaker is the representative of Pakistan. You have the floor, Ambassador.

Ms. Janjua (Pakistan): Mr. President, likewise, as a rotational accident, we will be following, but us following in your footsteps is not going to be easy because you have done an enormous amount of work and an amazing job as President of the Conference on Disarmament. At a time of different voices of concern — a mix of voices of concern and hope, I might say — I think you were able to bring in intellectual integrity and energy to the discussions within the Conference itself, as well as within the informal consultations that were held by you. We want to thank you very much for the effort that you put in.

You have five different proposals on the table, but you were undeterred by the enormity of the work and continued to — if I may say so — soldier on in this room, which is full of soldiers. I would thus like to congratulate you and your team for the effort that you put in and for the very consistent effort that you instilled into the work of the Conference. As we take over from you, these are very big shoes to fill, but we look forward to working with you and all our fellow Presidents for this session, as well as the member States of the Conference, to see how far we can take the work that you have been proceeding with.

The exact outline of what we intend to do will be presented on Monday when we are in the informal consultations with the other Presidents of the 2016 session and with the regional coordinators, and then on Tuesday, with the Conference on Disarmament. So I thank you very much for all your consistent support and I look forward to seeking your guidance and that of your predecessor, Peters Emuze, who is here, and was the Conference President from Nigeria, who also put in a great deal of work and energy. We thank you both for placing some important bricks which will help us in many ways.

The challenges are several, but there is nothing that cannot be achieved: where there is a will, there is a way. Thank you very much to each one of you. I look forward to your continued support in the Conference, and I look forward to seeing how far we can take the work of the Conference in the coming month, or little over a month because there is a break in the middle for us. Pakistan is honoured to be the next President of the Conference on Disarmament — even if it is a rotational accident — because to us, as to many others, it comes after 11 years. Our last presidency was held by a very important Pakistani Ambassador, Ambassador Masood Khan. We follow in his footsteps and the very strong parameters that you have placed.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Pakistan, the incoming President, for her statement. The next speaker is the representative of China. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Ji Haojun (China): Mr. President, I just wish to say: thank you. Over the past few weeks, you have been working so diligently and professionally, and you carried out many consultations aiming to bridge the gap and reach consensus on a programme of work. Unfortunately, the situation is as such, and it is a very difficult job. You have done your

best and I think you do not need to feel guilty about that. We are all very thankful and we will work closely with the incoming President, Pakistan, to try to find a way out.

The President: I thank the representative of China for his statement. The next speaker on the list is the Ambassador of Finland. You have the floor, Madam.

Ms. Kairamo (Finland): Mr. President, I too would like to express our warmest thanks to Norway and to you, Steffen, for the genuine efforts to take forward the work of the Conference on Disarmament. We have valued very much your work, your team and all the personal effort you put into this attempt to find a way out of the impasse. Given that Norway is our neighbouring country, I know that you knew all time that we would be supporting your work and, even though the relationship to the incoming presidency is not geographically so close, I can assure you that Finland stands ready to support the incoming presidency of Pakistan and we wish her all the best in the effort to take the work of the Conference forward.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Finland, our neighbour, for her statement. The next speaker is the Ambassador of the United Kingdom. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Rowland (United Kingdom): Mr. President, I would like to echo the words of appreciation of others for all your efforts over the last month. I hope you will continue to contribute your judicious counsel to this session's remaining Presidents over the coming months. That said, we are sure we will be in good hands with Ambassador Janjua and her team. Finally, I would like to say that we, too, share your assessment that time is not on our side; this Conference needs to begin work, if it is to have a hope of salvaging its reputation.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the United Kingdom for his statement. I now recognize the Netherlands. You have the floor, Ambassador.

Mr. Van der Kwast (Netherlands): Mr. President, like others, I would like to thank you for all your efforts. You have a long record of work in security and disarmament issues. I had the honour and pleasure of working before with you in more successful settings, for instance the 2010 Review Conference preparations. A lot of the things you have done before were successful; I also refer to the Convention on Cluster Munitions and what you have done in the framework of the Anti-Personnel Landmines Convention. Despite a critical attitude towards the Conference on Disarmament, you have made every effort. I think several statements here confirm that we really appreciate that you have put so much effort into this and, as others said, this was really soldiering on. Many thanks to you and I am afraid we are coming closer and closer to the critical assessment you mentioned, but we are still ready to work for that.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Netherlands for his statement. The next speaker on the list is the representative of Ireland. You have the floor, Madam.

Ms. Cullen (Ireland): As I take the floor for the first time, I can say a number of things echoing the words of colleagues in the room. I think the Netherlands hit the nail on the head. Speaking of all of your positive contributions, I can sense your personal disappointment, Mr. President, that this time around it has not been possible, but it is not through lack of effort. Everyone in the room, Ireland included, recognizes your tireless work over the past four weeks. My capital is studying very seriously all of the proposals for going forward. We know that there is a way out of this impasse; we look forward to supporting Pakistan as it assumes the presidency. Finally, if I may say, since there is an air of disappointment in the room and an air of sadness that we do not have a happy outcome, may I conclude by changing tack and wishing everyone an enormously happy St. Patrick's Day, our national holiday. Happy St. Patrick's Day to everyone.

The President: I thank the representative of Ireland for her statement. I see no other delegation wishing to take the floor.

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Allow me to break a bit with my normal practice and say a big "thank you" to all the speakers for the kind words expressed to me and my team. I certainly wish the best of luck to my successor but also to the members of this Conference. Thank you very much.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament will be held on Tuesday, 22 March, at 10 a.m., in the Council Chamber under the presidency of Pakistan.

This meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.